

Saudi Prince on Academic Shopping Spree

Posted by [Martin Kramer](#) in [Sandbox](#) on July 9, 2003

Last month, a newspaper in Exeter, England, carried a news item with this Thousand-and-One-Nights headline: "Rich Prince Shares Wealth with City's University Students." Saudi Prince Alwaleed bin Talal had flown into Exeter to make a [gift](#) of one million euros to the local university's Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies. The news item was absolutely breathless in its reportage. "Prince Alwaleed is almost certainly the richest person to have ever set foot in the city," the paper gushed. And he was "not one to travel lightly": "He originally planned to fly into Exeter Airport on his private A340 aircraft one of the longest planes in the world and what would have been the largest plane ever to land at the airport. But he decided to settle for a more modest jet for his large entourage."

Remember [Prince Alwaleed](#)? He's the nephew of Saudi King Fahd and Crown Prince Abdullah. *Forbes* [pegs](#) him as the fifth-richest man in the world, at \$17.7 billion net worth (half of it in Citigroup shares, which made him his fortune). And who can forget his monumental *faux pas*? Alwaleed visited Ground Zero in New York with then-Mayor Rudy Giuliani just after 9/11, and gave the city's Twin Towers relief fund a check for \$10 million. Giuliani promptly [returned](#) it after Alwaleed, in the media spotlight, pinned the blame for 9/11 on U.S. support for Israel.

Alwaleed received a [media drubbing](#), but that hasn't deterred him from his self-appointed mission to rescue the image of Islam and Saudi Arabia. He subsequently made a couple of small gifts half a million each [to](#) the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), and [to](#) the President George Herbert Walker Bush Scholarship Fund at Andover, the prep school that graduated both Bushes. It's the Saudi way. You give to legitimate causes (like the Twin Towers Fund and Andover), and exploit the gratitude to promote your political agenda (deflecting 9/11 responsibility or legitimizing CAIR-style advocacy). Pulling this off requires a deft touch, perfect timing, and the right amount of money. Alwaleed misread New York and Giuliani, and his timing was way off, but he usually gets it right, and he's back in the giving business.

His present plan runs in the direction of academe. Universities generate ideas, and Alwaleed regards one idea the "clash of civilizations" as positively dangerous to Arabs and Muslims. So he has embarked on a grand giving spree, to create academic "bridges" between Islam and the West, and specifically between the Arab world and the United States.

Last January, Alwaleed [made](#) a gift of \$10 million to the American University in Cairo for a center for American studies (and a new humanities and social sciences building). It was the largest single gift ever made to the university. Last month, he turned up in Beirut to [inaugurate](#) another center for American studies, this one at the American University of Beirut. The price tag: \$5.2 million. I actually think this is a worthwhile cause, although it's an obvious slap in the face to the indigenous universities. Their students are the ones who most desperately need lessons in America, but Egyptian or Saudi faculty would almost certainly turn such centers into "know-thine-enemy" hate factories.

But that's only one half of the strategy. In Cairo, Alwaleed hinted at the broader plan, when he [called](#) his American studies centers "one pillar of a bridge connecting the divide between the United States and the rest of the Arab World." He then added: "We now need to

Martin Kramer on the Middle East

Search GO

LATEST POSTS

[The vote that really made Israel](#)
[Two more seconds from "The Crown"](#)
[Kept secret from "The Crown"?](#)
[A defense treaty between the US and Israel? Just say no](#)
[The fantasy of an international Jerusalem](#)

Your email address:

Subscribe



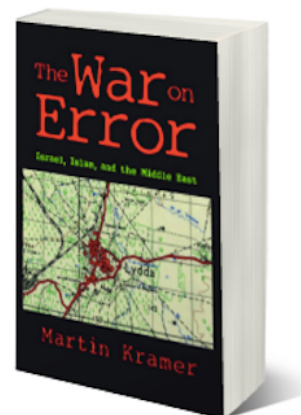
RELATED POST

[The decline of Palestine studies](#)

TOPICS

[9/11](#) [1948 war](#) [1967 War](#) [academic freedom](#) [Arab nationalism](#) [Ari Shavit](#) [Barack Obama](#) [Bernard Lewis](#) [book prize](#) [Campus Watch](#) [Columbia](#) [David Ben-Gurion](#) [Edward Said](#) [Egypt](#) [Gaza](#) [Hamas](#) [Harvard](#) [Hezbollah](#) [Iran](#) [Iraq war](#) [Islamism](#) [Israel](#) [Jews](#) [John Mearsheimer](#) [Joseph Massad](#) [Juan Cole](#) [Lydda](#) [Middle Eastern studies](#) [Middle East Studies Association](#) [Palestinians](#) [Rashid Khalidi](#) [Shalem College](#) [Stephen Walt](#) [Syria terrorism](#) [The Washington Institute](#) [for Near East Policy](#) [Title VI](#) [United States](#) [US policy](#) [Zionism](#)

MUST-READ!



The War on Error: Israel, Islam, and the Middle East is a collection of essays spanning the range of Martin Kramer's interests. Josef Joffe: "Required reading for anyone who prefers intellectual rigor to ideological obfuscation." Elliott Abrams: "Sharp, wise, and very funny." [Go here](#) for info, Amazon order.

LINKAGE

These constantly-updated links are selected by Martin Kramer.

plant another [pillar] on the other side." In Exeter, he **provided** still more detail:

This endowment represents one component of a major effort that I have embarked upon to bridge the gap that has arisen between Islamic and Western communities in recent years. To that end, I have recently established centers of American studies and research at the American University in Cairo (AUC) and the American University of Beirut (AUB). And I am in the process of establishing centers of Arab and Islamic studies at select universities in the United States.

Well! It's possible that at this very moment, Prince Alwaleed's scouts are scouring America for campuses to plant his "pillars," and you can bet that academic higher-ups who know it are primping themselves. Will the prince prefer entirely new centers on virgin soil? (King Fahd gave about \$20 million ten years ago, to create a Middle East **center** in his name at the University of Arkansas.) Or will Alwaleed prefer to embed programs within existing Middle East centers at top universities? (Prince Sultan did that at **Berkeley** for \$5 million, and Khalid al-Turki did it at **Harvard** for \$2 million.) The mind boggles at the possibilities, when you think of the purchasing power of the world's fifth-richest man.

Of course, this is why we can't ever expect to get the straight story on Saudi Arabia, Wahhabism, and oil from people who operate within Middle Eastern studies. If you want a fabulously wealthy Saudi royal to drop out of the sky in his private jet and leave a few million, you had better watch what you say—which means you had better say nothing. For example, look at the **program** of the upcoming Middle East Studies Association conference, scheduled for November. The conference panels will include over 300 presentations. There are, by my count, at least twenty-five presentations dealing with the Palestinians. There are zero—that's right, *zero*—dealing with Saudi Arabia. Silence is golden.

Saudi money, as I've written **before**, has already compromised the research agenda in Middle Eastern studies. Prince Alwaleed's buying binge is liable to reduce the entire field to a cargo cult, with profs and center directors dancing the **ardha** in the hope of attracting the flying prince. This is great for Saudi Arabia. It's not at all great for the American public, which seeks objective assessments of the Saudi kingdom.

Can anything be done to mitigate creeping corruption? Here's an idea. The U.S. government subsidizes Middle East centers through the Title VI program of the Department of Education. Beginning next year, there will be seventeen National Resource Centers for the Middle East, a record number. Instead of funding so many centers, wouldn't it make more sense to concentrate taxpayers' resources in centers willing to forgo all foreign funding? Say no to foreign money, get more U.S. funding, and tell some truths about places like Saudi Arabia.

As Congress reauthorizes the Higher Education Act, it should give thought to the effect of foreign funding on area studies, and especially Middle Eastern studies. But that evaluation will take time. In the near future, don't be surprised to see grinning university presidents posing with Prince Alwaleed. They will say there are no strings attached. *Puris omnia pura*: To the pure all things are pure. Academics do flatter themselves.

Update: It's more than two years since this posting, but Prince Alwaleed has finally acted, making gifts of \$20 million each to Harvard and Georgetown. And who's walked away with the money at Georgetown? None other than John Esposito. See my *Sandbox* posting, **Georgetown Yankees in Prince Alwaleed's Court**.

Middle Eastern studies, Prince Alwaleed, Saudi Arabia

Martin Kramer on the Middle East

google.com/+MartinKramerOr...

Commentary and analysis on the Mid...

 Follow

GOOGLE+ LATEST

"Americans' stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is as strongly pro-Israel as at any time in Gallup's..."

"The Crown," the Netflix series on the life of Queen Elizabeth II, is based on history, but not bounded... Uri Lubrani, one of Israel's most nimble trouble-shooters, has passed away. He specialized in dealing...

Have you seen (or binge-watched) the Netflix series "The Crown"? And wondered whether this conversation...



Martin Kramer
@Martin_Kramer
The May 1948 Vote that Made the State of #Israel by Martin Kramer
[mosaicmagazine.com/essay/2018/04/...](https://mosaicmagazine.com/essay/2018/04/)



28m

Martin Kramer
@Martin_Kramer
IDF chief: The likelihood of war has increased substantially, interview with Gadi Eizenkot
israelhayom.com/2018/03/30/idf...

Mar 31, 2018

Martin Kramer
@Martin_Kramer
The Real Reason That Palestinians In Gaza Are Marching by Asaf Romirowsky
meforum.org/articles/2018/...

Mar 31, 2018

Martin Kramer
@Martin_Kramer
The Secret World of the Palestinian Authority by Bassam Tawil
gatestoneinstitute.org/12103/palestin...



Mar 29, 2018

Martin Kramer
@Martin_Kramer
On Israel and the Theory of Everything by Gary C. Gambill
garycgambill.org/21003/israel-a...



Follow @martin_kramer 8,328 followers

FACEBOOK



Martin Kramer

Like Page



Martin Kramer

about 3 weeks ago

"Americans' stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is as strongly pro-Israel as at any time in Gallup's three-decade trend.... Israel's current favorable score is the highest for that

MUST-READ



A forgotten vote made the State of Israel. Not the vote you think. [Read more](#)

 [View on Instagram](#)



Click on image for caption.

Search

GO

